# Creating immersion:

# Pedagogical practices for the linguistic integration of adult refugees in the US

Undergraduate Research Thesis

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**Abstract**

Despite decades of research suggesting the beneficial role of immersion in learning a second language, half of all refugees in the United States remain unable to reach basic English proficiency after five years' residence (Office of Refugee Resettlement, 2017). Whereas recent studies have identified structural barriers hindering refugees' ability to attend ESL classes (Al Hariri, 2018; Mirzaa & Heinemann, 2012; Tshabangu-Soko & Caron, 2012), less attention has been focused on the practices of language instruction employed within ESL classrooms, the nature of the research informing the design of current pedagogies, and how these components together impact refugees' language acquisition. This study combines questionnaires and semi-structured interviews with ESL instructors for adult refugees to firstly understand how the activities and approaches to teaching ESL to adult refugees used by resettlement organizations compare to what the most relevant literature suggests would be most effective. Secondly, it aims to identify which resources instructors rely upon for planning, for which student populations these resources are designed, and how this relates to program implementation. Finally, it expands the current understanding of how structural barriers to accessing in-person classes impact the effectiveness of ESL pedagogy for adult refugees as delivered in practice today. Results suggest a general adherence among ESL instructors to the pedagogical approaches and activities suggested by research to be most effective. Despite an apparent lack of empirically-based educational resources specifically for adult refugees, instructors have demonstrated admirable ingenuity in leveraging both personal experiences and creative experimentation to meet the needs of their students. Nevertheless, more concentrated research efforts to develop appropriate empirically-informed materials for use with refugee learners could be of tremendous value.

*Keywords*: refugees, ESL, pedagogy

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# 1. Background

The well-documented view that there is a close association between gains in a second language and immersion in a society where that language is spoken continues to motivate many language students to participate in study abroad programs (Freed, 1998; Hernández, 2010). In fact, many universities have implemented requirements for students specializing in a second language to study abroad (Coleman, 1998). Additional studies have further revealed that longer stays abroad tend to be associated with greater gains in target language proficiency (Magnan & Lafford, 2011). For this reason, it is surprising at first glance that nearly half of all refugees resettled in the United States continue to speak little or no English after five years of residence (Office of Refugee Resettlement, 2017). It is important to note, however, that refugees face a wide variety of urgent needs and considerations that may often assume immediate priority over language learning, and thus cannot be fairly compared directly with American university students (Garrett, 2006). Nevertheless, many stakeholders hope for greater gains in English proficiency for these new Americans.

## 1.1. Refugee Resettlement in the United States

According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), a refugee is legally defined as a someone who:

> owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it. (UNHCR, 1951; United Nations General Assembly, 1967)

Since 1975, a total of 3,456,532 refugees have settled in the United States through the UNHCR's third country resettlement program. In the period between 2015 and 2020 alone, a total of 272,974 refugees arrived, with an annual average of 45,496 (Refugee Processing Center, 2021). The demand for resettlement in the United States may well increase in the near future, however, as a result of climate-related disasters, among other factors. The number of climate refugees might well reach 200 million by 2050, "a ten-fold increase over [2008]'s entire documented refugee and internally displaced populations" according to the International Organization for Migration (Brown, 2008, p. 11).

When refugees are approved for resettlement in the United States by US Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), the US Department of State (DOS)'s Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM) transfers their case to one of nine nonprofit resettlement agencies, also known as Voluntary Agencies (VOLAGs) (DOS, n.d.). At the time of this study, the nine VOLAGs working in contract with the PRM included Church World Service, Episcopal Migration Ministries, Ethiopian Community Development Council, HIAS, the International Rescue Committee, Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service, the U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, and World Relief (Refugee Processing Center, 2020). In turn, these nine VOLAGs oversee approximately 300 local-level nonprofit organizations, known as local affiliates, who work directly with clients and provide a wide array of services, including connection to English as a second language (ESL) education, with the central goal of achieving economic self-sufficiency (DOS, n.d.).

In terms of language, the top ten native languages spoken by refugees in the United States include Arabic, Nepali, Somali, Sgaw Karen, Spanish, Swahili, Chaldean, Burmese, Armenian, and Farsi (Refugee Processing Center, 2019). Some of these individuals are either preliterate (i.e.

in a situation where their language does not have a commonly written form) or nonliterate (i.e. their language has a written form that they are unable to read or write). Among those adult refugees who arrived in the United States between 2011 and 2016, approximately 80.2% arrived speaking English "not well" or "not at all", while the remaining 19.8% spoke English "well" or "very well" according to self-report (Office of Refugee Resettlement, 2017). As a result, most refugees are connected with ESL education. In some instances, the local affiliates offer in-house classes, while others refer their clients to external community partners, such as nearby community colleges. Among refugees who have been in the United States for an average of five years, 45.4% continue to speak English "not well" or "not at all" (Office of Refugee Resettlement, 2017).

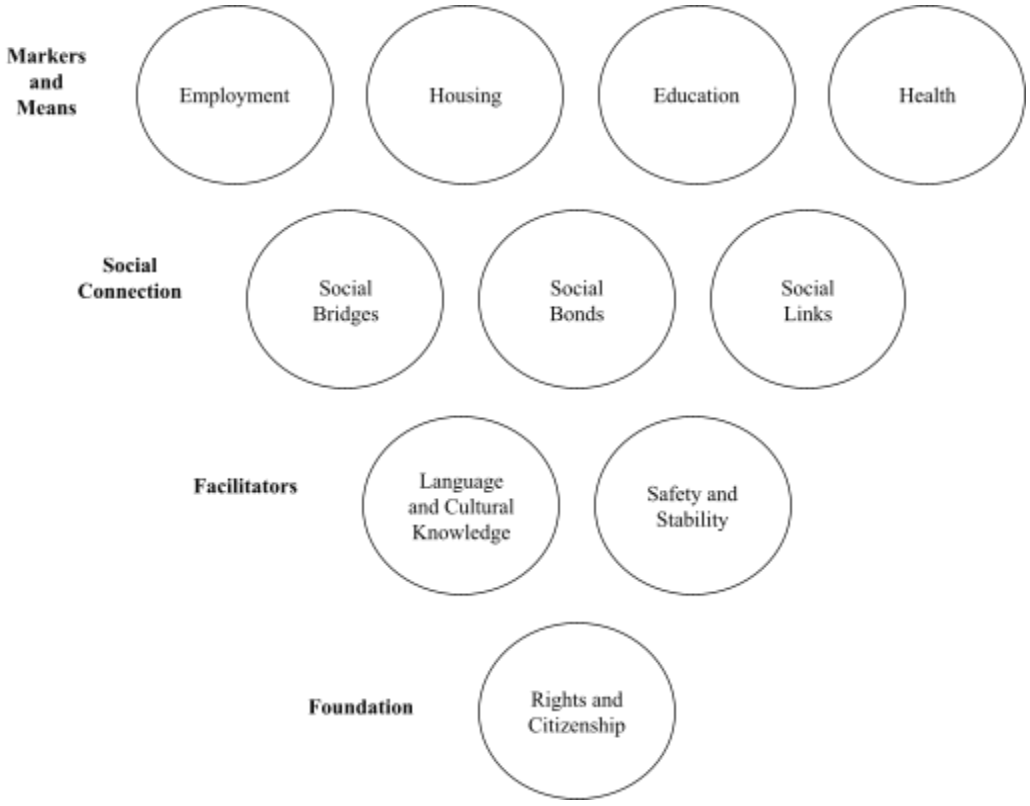
**1.2. Language and Integration**

The ability to speak the language of the host society, at least in Western contexts, has been linked with more effective integration in immigration contexts. Ager and Strang (2008, p. 170) propose a widely-accepted model of what constitutes successful integration (Figure 1). In this model, the immigrant's ability to access different types of social connection, employment, housing, education, and health are dependent upon a solid foundation in language and cultural knowledge. From this view, they argue that proficiency in the host language is "consistently identified as central to the integration process" (p. 182).

There have been countless reported cases in which host language proficiency has been shown to have significant benefits in refugee contexts. For example, the DOS' Reception and Placement Program—the primary program responsible for overseeing and funding refugees' resettlement services, including ESL classes, for their first 3 months in the United States—clearly prioritizes the economic benefits of English proficiency; the explicit goal of this

**Figure 1**

*A Conceptual Framework Defining Core Domains of Integration (Ager & Strang, 2008, p. 170)*




program is, in fact, "to achieve economic self-sufficiency through employment as soon as possible after their arrival in the United States." In effect, in terms of pure economic integration, recent study of immigrants in Canada found that those immigrants with lower levels of host language proficiency tended to have lower weekly earnings (Boyd & Cao, 2009). However, the benefits of host language proficiency are certainly not limited to the employment arena.

The failure to develop host language skills has been associated with a worsening of the impact of stress on refugee health and psychological problems (Alemi et al., 2014; Bogic & Alegría, 2015; Ding & Hargraves, 2009). This can directly manifest in medical settings, where hospital staff often neglect to use interpreting services (Divi et al., 2007), or in the home. An

unpublished survey from New Hampshire revealed that many refugees are unable to understand the instructions on their prescription bottles (Tshabangu-Soko & Caron, 2011). While interpreters can be useful, they are not always a sustainable or effective solution to crossing the language barrier. In therapy settings, the use of interpretation can actually have adverse effects on refugees' mental health. In addition, many refugees may frequently depend on their children to serve as interpreters, which can be associated with a range of negative consequences (Finlay et al., 2017). Finally, a recent longitudinal study by Tip et al. (2019) found that, among refugees, better skills in the host language were associated with greater intergroup contact with native-born members of the host country at a later date, which in turn predicted greater well-being.

With all of this in mind, it can easily be understood that the inability to acquire proficiency in the host language can complicate every aspect of the integration process (Li & Sah, 2019). With the crucial importance of linguistic integration in mind, it is worth considering why refugees are seemingly unable to access the well-documented promises of language immersion.

### 1.3. Language Immersion

Understanding the empirical foundation of what makes language immersion so effective may shed some light into the question of why adult refugees do not always appear to benefit from this immersion in terms of language learning journeys. Though not a perfect demographic comparison, the results of Freed et al. (2004)'s comparative analysis of different language learning contexts offers some particularly valuable insight into the reasons behind why language immersion is so impactful for university students. The study revealed that, under certain conditions, domestic intensive immersion programs can be more effective than study abroad settings; specifically, this occurred when students were able to have consistent high-quality

interactions in the target language and when effective communicative language pedagogy was employed, among other factors.

It is common for refugees resettled in Western societies to face disproportionate levels of social isolation (Johnson et al., 2019), a phenomenon that may be further perpetuated by difficulties establishing trust and few opportunities for reciprocal relationships (Strang & Quinn, 2019). In addition, some studies have demonstrated that lower levels of initial English proficiency are associated with a decreased likelihood to use English for social purposes with native-born residents (Akresh et al., 2014). Therefore, for many refugees, the inability to establish high-quality interactions in the target language compromise their ability to benefit from language immersion to a notable extent. As a result, it is especially critical to understand the effectiveness of the ESL education that adult refugees receive. In order to do this, there are two different components that must be examined. First, considering the many challenges that refugees are tasked with overcoming simultaneously, it is worthwhile to examine the systematic barriers to participation in ESL education among refugees and the extent to which they are able to access classroom instruction. Second, when these barriers to participation are able to be overcome, the actual pedagogy employed in these classrooms must also be examined.

### 1.4. Structural Barriers to Linguistic Integration

Between 1981 and 1982, the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) conducted a comprehensive study focused on the language learning experiences of Southeast Asian refugees across the United States (Reder et al., 1984). Specifically, they examined the ESL programs offered by the 327 service providers receiving ORR funding in order to determine what contributes most to their successful acquisition of the English language. The results of their study suggested previous educational experience to be “the most important factor” in determining ESL

outcomes for refugees in the United States (p. 25). In addition, they found several groups to face inequitable barriers to participation in the ESL classroom, including (a) those who were working and whose work schedules overlapped with and took priority over language classes, (b) women, who were often expected or required to stay home with children (c) those with mental or physical health problems, whose illnesses or medical appointments prevented them from attending class frequently, and (d) those with limited access to transportation.

Decades later, many of these barriers to learning persist. Refugees with jobs remain largely unable to attend ESL classes, while both students and instructors have suggested the establishment of more accessible weekend classes (Tshabangu-Soko & Caron, 2012). A lack of transportation and childcare also continue to pose challenges for many (Al Hariri, 2018; Mirzaa & Heinemann, 2012). In addition, several new barriers have been presented in more recent investigations, including a lack of sufficient hours of instruction, a dependence on untrained volunteers, and a lack of adequate educational services for refugees with disabilities (Mirzaa & Heinemann, 2012; Tshabangu-Soko & Caron, 2011).

While more studies in recent decades have successfully identified these structural barriers impeding refugees' abilities to participate fully in ESL programs and made subsequent recommendations for improvement, less attention has been given to the specific practices of language instruction employed within the ESL classroom and how it relates to refugees' successful language acquisition.

### 1.5. Best Practices in Second Language Pedagogy

No books could be found that were either designed or informed by research to meet the specific needs of adult refugee language learners. Parrish (2019), however, provides an overview of empirically-supported best practices for teaching ESL to general adult populations which she

contextualizes as a guide for teachers of immigrants. In the introductory chapter of her book, she encourages readers to consider the various needs and considerations of adult learners transitioning into a new culture. It is important to note, though, that much of the research supporting these traditional approaches to second language instruction has not necessarily been conducted with immigrant populations and rarely, if ever, with refugees. These individuals may have different needs in engaging with the language classroom than the general adult population and more research understanding these differences may be beneficial in understanding how to best support their language learning experiences. Nevertheless, due to the contextualization of this work as a guide for teachers of immigrants, its guidance in terms of effective approaches and activities for adult ESL has been used as the primary standard of evaluation for investigating ESL programs for adult refugees in this study.

The work of Parrish (2019) is further supplemented in this study by two additional articles which grant direct empirical insight into supporting more meaningful ESL for adult learners in immigration contexts. First, Norton Peirce (1995) suggests the value of directly exploring opportunities for students to engage with native English speakers and reflect critically on these experiences in the classroom. Since adult refugees are known to face high levels of social isolation, these discussions may be of great value for refugee learners. Second, as one of the few available sources reporting on best practices in ESL for refugees as a specific population, some conclusions from Tollefson (1985) have also been incorporated into the framework laid out by Parrish (2019).

The overall conceptualization of best practices of ESL for adult refugees in terms of pedagogical approaches and classroom activities, as informed by these three sources, are summarized below.

### *1.5.1. Empirically-Based Approaches*

Aspects of two specific approaches to language teaching explained in Parrish (2019) have been incorporated into this study. Specifically, the natural approach and communicative language teaching (CLT) have been selected to represent effective approaches due to the tried-and-true nature of these well-established approaches in the foundation of contemporary world language pedagogy. In addition, Parrish (2019) emphasizes the importance of implementing various principles of learner-centered teaching when working with immigrant learners. Though not an official approach, learner-centered teaching and how it informs both the natural approach and CLT is also taken into consideration for the purposes of this study.

The first approach that is considered is the natural approach. One aspect of the natural approach that is included in this study is the clear prioritization of learners' comprehension of linguistic input before expecting significant independent production in the target language. In effect, it assumes that students will observe a silent period, in which comprehension is prioritized over production, and instructors typically do not rush students to communicate in the target language.

The second approach considered is communicative language teaching (CLT), in which "the goal of instruction is learners' ability to [communicate] effectively and appropriately" (Parrish, 2019, p. 37). To achieve this goal, instructors incorporating CLT are less concerned with perfect form and more concerned with the ability to communicate novel information (i.e., knowledge that another person will not already possess). Drills are rarely used, if at all, and the goal is to use authentic materials. Confidence in the viability of CLT for refugee learners is reiterated in Tollefson (1985), in that "explicit error correction should be avoided" and that "classes should include regular opportunities for natural interaction (speaking and listening)" (p.

755). When adhering to CLT, it is now accepted that drills should rarely, if ever, be used in effective language instruction, as confirmed by a recent empirical study, “The evidence is IN: Drills are OUT” (Wong & Van Patten, 2008).

Finally, Parrish (2019) describes the value of adhering to learner-centered teaching in the adult ESL classroom, where factors such as “pressure to move into the workplace before having adequate language skills” require that instruction be “highly customized” and “accessible” (p. 11). In short, incorporating principles of learner-centered teaching acknowledges both the diverse wealth of knowledge that adult learners bring to the classroom and their diverse expectations and needs with respect to learning. Such considerations are especially valuable in refugee classrooms where students are constantly arriving with a wide range of previous educational experiences, literacy skills, and, therefore, immediate language needs.

### *1.5.2. Empirically-Based Activities*

The implementation of four general categories of classroom activities is considered in this study: audio-lingual activities, activities informed by communicative-language teaching, total physical response activities, and content-based instruction.

Audio-lingual activities, based on the principles of behaviorism, rely heavily on the “memorization of largely formulaic dialogues, drill and repetition,” with “little room for meaningful use of language” (Parrish, 2019, p. 32). Audio-lingual activities may be useful to a limited degree in some contexts (e.g. pronunciation practice), but should serve only as a rare complement to the more effective types of activities, including the three explored below. Tollefson (1985) expressed a similar opinion in regard to the usefulness of audio-lingual activities, noting that “drills designed to elicit specific sentences are generally of little value” (p. 755).

The effectiveness of activities that follow the principles of communicative language teaching (CLT) has gained significant credibility as an alternative to audio-lingual activities (Parrish, 2019). In stark contrast to audio-lingual activities, CLT activities are aimed entirely at encouraging students to make meaningful and purposeful use of the target language. For example, an activity where all students are given a different piece of paper with a given objective (e.g. find someone who likes the same type of music as you) that requires students to communicate and exchange novel information with their peers would be considered communicative. Tollefson (1985) has similarly suggested the value of activities with "a planned method for eliciting responses without requiring production of specific structures," or "role playing (without specifying utterances to be used)" (p. 755).

The third type of activities considered here fall under the umbrella of total physical response (TPR). In TPR-style activities, which follow some principles of the natural approach to language teaching, students are not expected to produce language at the early stages of acquisition. Instead, the focus is on input, and the students demonstrate their comprehension of the teacher's language by reacting appropriately. TPR-style activities might often be used with a new set of vocabulary or grammar rules, before students have fully mastered them to a level sufficient for output. For example, students may listen to the instructor give a set of directions before tracing directions on a map or making some type of craft (Tollefson, 1985).

The final type of language activity considered in this study were those following content-based instruction. In content-based instruction, the instructor will teach a lesson about a given subject (e.g. government, history, etc.) through which students have the opportunity to acquire new language and allow their current knowledge to be reinforced.

### 1.6. Pedagogical Barriers to Linguistic Integration

The ORR's report included two key findings concerning the actual practices of language instruction in local affiliates' ESL classrooms. First, the report noted that teachers tend to be given significant discretion in determining which approaches and materials they wish to use in the classroom (Reder et al., 1984). Consequently, they found that "appropriate materials, assessment procedures, and staff training activities are designed over and over again independently in individual classrooms and programs" (p. 64). In other words, local affiliates were given great discretion over the approaches and materials to be incorporated into instruction, and it was common for each organization to create its own materials. However, there appears to be a notable lack of empirically-based resources exploring best practices of ESL instruction specifically for adult refugees; the most relevant available research on the subject is generally focused on ESL for adults more broadly, with little consideration for the additional psychosocial experiences of those experiencing forced migration. Thus, instructors are constantly faced with the significant challenge of determining which approaches and materials could work best with their student populations.

Second, they found that refugees from nonliterate backgrounds were significantly and disproportionately underserved. It was determined that much of the classroom instruction implicitly assumed that students had literacy skills, even when this was not the case. In fact, subsequent studies have found that most teachers of nonliterate students had not had any specialized training in adult literacy development (Tollefson, 1985). Tollefson (1985) proposed three main problems for nonliterate students: the overuse of written materials in the classroom, the disconnect between the content in literacy materials and the personal experiences of refugees, and the lack of instructor training in adult literacy development. Today, refugees from preliterate

and nonliterate backgrounds remain greatly underserved, largely in part due to a lack of understanding of how to best support their language education (Black, 2013; Tshabangu-Soko, 2011). Ultimately, however, the specific classroom practices used by local affiliates to support refugees' acquisition of the English language have remained largely unexamined from studies of ESL programs for refugees since the early 1980s. This paper attempts to bridge this gap.

### 1.7. Present Study

Through a combination of quantitative questionnaire data and semi-structured qualitative interviews, the present study aims to capture a more comprehensive image of how in-person ESL classes for refugees resettled in the United States operated on a national level prior to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in March of 2020. This study was carried out with the following four primary research questions in mind:

1. What are the resources that ESL instructors for adult refugees use? For whom are these resources designed? If there is a mismatch, how does this relate to their lesson planning process?
2. How do the approaches to teaching in-person ESL held by American resettlement organizations generally compare to what the most relevant available literature suggests would be the most effective approaches?
3. How do the types of activities employed in these in-person ESL classes generally compare to what the most relevant available literature suggests would be the most effective activities?
4. In what ways do the structural barriers to accessing in-person ESL classes impact the effectiveness of in-person ESL pedagogy for adult refugees as delivered in practice today? How do instructors address these barriers?

Taken together, these four questions will provide significant insight into the ways in which the lack of research and empirically-based classroom materials supporting ESL education specifically for adult refugees influence their classroom experiences. Moreover, a more thorough understanding of how these ESL classrooms operate will allow for more targeted research efforts investigating how to best support adult refugees' linguistic integration.

## 2. Methods

### 2.1. Participants

The participants in this study included ESL instructors for adult refugees working with local affiliate organizations in contract with one of the nine VOLAGs across the United States. More specifically, participants consisted solely of employees of those organizations offering in-house ESL classes at the local affiliate office. Participants were also required to have taught these adult ESL classes in-person prior to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in March of 2020.

A total of 47 people took part in this study, though the data of six participants were excluded from analyses for a total of 41 participants. Two of the six individuals revealed in the data collection process that they were administrators of their local affiliate's ESL programs, as opposed to actual instructors. Two participants failed to fully complete the initial questionnaire form and their incomplete responses were excluded from consideration. One individual was excluded from consideration as they were an ESL instructor for refugee children but not adults. One final individual revealed during their interview that they did not become an ESL instructor until after classes were already transitioned to a distance learning format as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, and thus had not taught an in-person class.

### *2.1.1. Participant Recruitment*

In order to identify participants who would be eligible for this study, a list was compiled of all local affiliate organizations in contract with each of the nine VOLAGs as defined above. The website of each VOLAG included a list of its own respective local affiliates. Those local affiliate organizations listed who do not appear to offer resettlement services were excluded from consideration. In some cases, local affiliate organizations were partnered with more than one VOLAG, in which case their duplicate was also removed from the final list. The resulting list consisted of 277 local affiliate organizations, 11 of whose current email address or contact form could not be located online. The final 266 local affiliates were contacted either by email or contact form, depending upon which option was available on their website, during the autumn of 2020. The organization was informed of the research project and was requested to provide email addresses of their ESL instructors to be contacted and invited to the study. The study's incentives, a $20 Amazon gift card for each of the two study phases, were also mentioned in this initial point of contact. Funding for these Amazon gift cards was provided by The Ohio State University College of Arts and Sciences' Honors Program, the Department of French and Italian, the Honor Society of Phi Kappa Phi Chapter 155. The local affiliates that did not offer in-house classes, and instead referred clients to external organizations, were requested to reply with this information as well. Through this recruitment process, email addresses were collected for a total of 50 instructors, and 6 organizations requested to put the researcher in contact with instructors without revealing their contact information.

### *2.1.2. Participant Demographics*

Participants represented significant geographic variation, having reported the division of the United States within which their local affiliate is located, as defined by the United States Census Bureau (2010) and reflected in Table 1.

**Table 1**

*Location of Local Affiliates Employing Study Participants*

| Census Division | Number of Participants | States Included |
|---|---|---|
| New England | 7 | CT, ME, MA, NH, RI, VT |
| Mid-Atlantic | 7 | NJ, NY, PA |
| East North Central | 7 | IL, IN, MI, OH, WI |
| West North Central | 3 | IA, KS, MN, MO, NE, ND, SD |
| South Atlantic | 1 | DE, FL, GA, MD, NC, SC, VA, WV, DC |
| East South Central | 7 | AL, KY, MS, TN |
| West South Central | 2 | AR, LA, OK, TX |
| Mountain | 0 | AZ, CO, ID, MT, NV, NM, UT, WY |
| Pacific | 7 | AK, CA, HI, OR, WA |

In terms of the highest level of education completed, 17 participants (41.5%) reported completing a bachelor's degree, 23 (56.1%) completed a master's degree, and 1 (2.4%) completed a doctorate degree. Of the 40 participants who shared the details of their bachelor's degree (including those who also had higher qualifications) 22 (55.0%) majored in the humanities, 15 (37.5%) in the social sciences, 3 (7.5%) in education, 2 (5%) in business, 1 (2.5%) in the natural sciences, 1 (2.5%) in engineering, and 1 (2.5%) in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL).[1] Of the 24 participants who reported having earned a master's degree, 6 (25.0%) concentrated in TESOL, 6 (25.0%) in the humanities, 5 (20.8%) in

[1] The sum of these numbers is greater than 40 since some instructors' had double majors.

education fields other than TESOL[2], 5 (20.8%) in the social sciences (two of which were in linguistics), 2 (8.7%) in social work, and 1 (4.3%) in business. In addition, 32 of the 41 participants (78.0%) indicated that they were certified ESL instructors for adults, and 32 of 41 (78.0%) reported having received formal training in adult literacy instruction outside of a refugee resettlement organization. The years of experience teaching ESL that participants held prior to starting their current teaching position with the local affiliate ranged from 0 to 31 with an average of seven years of experience.[3]

The number of years that participants reported having served in their current teaching position with the local affiliate ranged from 0.5 to 15 with an average of 1.88 years.[4] 19 (48.7%) described their teaching position as part-time paid employment while 20 (51.3%) were in full-time paid positions.

## 2.2. Procedure

The present study was carried out across two online-administered phases, including one questionnaire and one semi-structured interview. Both components were focused on practices of ESL instruction for adult refugees prior to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic (before March of 2020).

### *2.2.1. Questionnaires*

The questionnaire was drafted in order to collect information primarily surrounding the instructors' educational and professional backgrounds and the approaches, activities, and assessments that they used to address their classroom goals (Appendix A). The measure

[2] Education fields other than TESOL included Curriculum & Instruction, Elementary Education, Adult Education, and Education.

[3] There were four instructors who did not provide a response to the question asking, "Approximately how many years of experience teaching ESL did you have prior to this position?" Because it was unclear whether this was intended to signify zero years, or an intentional or accidental skip of this particular question, these numbers were calculated using only the data of the 37 instructors who did provide a clear response.

[4] Responses of five instructors were excluded from analyses for this item either because it was left blank or because an unclear response was given.

consisted of 72 items in predominantly forced-choice formats. The final item on the questionnaire asked participants if they would like to be contacted for a follow-up interview and/or future studies.

Following approval from the Institutional Review Board, the questionnaire items were uploaded into an online format administered by Qualtrics. Participants were then sent a link to access the questionnaire on the Qualtrics platform. The landing page instructed participants to review and sign the consent form before beginning. Administration of this questionnaire took place during December of 2020 and January of 2021. Upon completion, participants were encouraged to leave an email address to which the $20 Amazon gift card incentive could be sent. Participants were also asked if they would be interested in being contacted for participation in future studies. Any email addresses that were provided were subsequently detached from the data set, and either stored separately, if they were interested in future studies, or permanently deleted upon reception of their compensation. As described above, a total of 47 individuals completed the questionnaire, although six individuals' data were excluded from consideration.

#### *2.2.2. Interviews*

Following questionnaire data collection, a five-item semi-structured interview script was drafted, in part drawing on preliminary results from questionnaire data (Appendix B). Two of the interview items aimed to collect more detail regarding information directly collected in the questionnaire; namely, participants were asked to elaborate on the types of activities that they incorporate (questionnaire data reported in Table 8) and the form of their final assessments (questionnaire data reported in Table 12 and Table 13). Another two items were included to better understand unforeseen results in the questionnaire data. Specifically, in light of the fact that 80% of participants reported that their average student stops attending classes within their

first year, participants were asked about the causes of student dropout. In addition, because 76.5% of instructors reported that their classes included students who were either preliterate or nonliterate, participants were asked if these students receive modified instruction and what form that takes.[5] Finally, in order to address the first research question, which was not adequately addressed in the questionnaire items, one question was added inquiring about the nature of the resources that instructors use for lesson planning.

Following a second round of approval from the Institutional Review Board, 20 of the 35 questionnaire participants who designated interest in completing a follow-up interview were invited to participate in this next phase of the study. 12 responded and participated in the round of interviews, which were conducted via video conferencing available through Zoom Video Communications. The qualitative data collected from one of these instructors was excluded from analyses after they revealed that they did not begin teaching until after March of 2020.

Prior to the interview, participants were sent a consent form via email that they were instructed to review prior to their scheduled time and told that their joining of the Zoom meeting would imply their consent to participate. They were also informed that the interviews would be recorded and stored until the conversations were fully transcribed and de-identified. Interviews were carried out during February of 2021, and participants received a second $20 Amazon gift card within one week of completion. The interview recordings were manually transcribed and de-identified by the interviewer to protect participant anonymity. Following this transcription process, all interview recordings were permanently deleted.

[5] The results of these questions were determined to be outside the scope of the analyses of this study. However, it is vital that these questions be considered for future research.

### 2.3. Data Analysis

#### *2.3.1. Questionnaires*

Data collected on the Qualtrics platform was exported as a CSV file for manual quantitative analyses. The majority of responses from survey items were totaled and reported directly in the results section of this paper. In some instances, percentages were calculated by hand and reported alongside the relevant result where appropriate.

#### *2.3.2. Interviews*

All interviews were manually transcribed by the interviewer and all identifiable information was either edited to ensure confidentiality or removed entirely. After this transcription process, all audiovisual recordings were permanently deleted. The resulting interview transcripts were analyzed qualitatively using Dedoose software through a deductive coding process. The patterns that emerged in participant responses were organized in relation to three of the study's four primary research questions and have been summarized and reported in the sections below.

## 3. Results

### 3.1. Questionnaires

Since not all of the items were marked as required in the Qualtrics platform, some of the participants did not provide responses to all of the questions. Consequently, not all items incorporate responses from all 41 participants. The total number of participants who answered a given question is indicated when appropriate.

#### *3.1.1. Student Demographics*

The overall sizes of the local affiliate organizations for which study participants worked varied significantly. Of the 28 instructors who shared this information, two instructors (7.1%)

reported working for an organization serving 1-10 refugee clients, seven (25.0%) were serving 11-50 clients, six (21.4%) were serving 51-99, thirteen (46.4%) were serving over 100 clients. From this information, it can be inferred that the ESL classrooms in question in this study included a total of at least 1,685 refugees. The native languages of these refugee students, as shared by 34 of their instructors, are shown in Table 2.

**Table 2**

*Native Languages of Adult Refugees in ESL Classes*

| Language | Number of Classes |
|---|---|
| Arabic | 30 |
| Nepali | 7 |
| Somali | 13 |
| Sgaw Karen | 13 |
| Spanish | 24 |
| Swahili | 24 |
| Burmese | 20 |
| Chaldean | 0 |
| Armenian | 1 |
| Kinyarwanda | 19 |

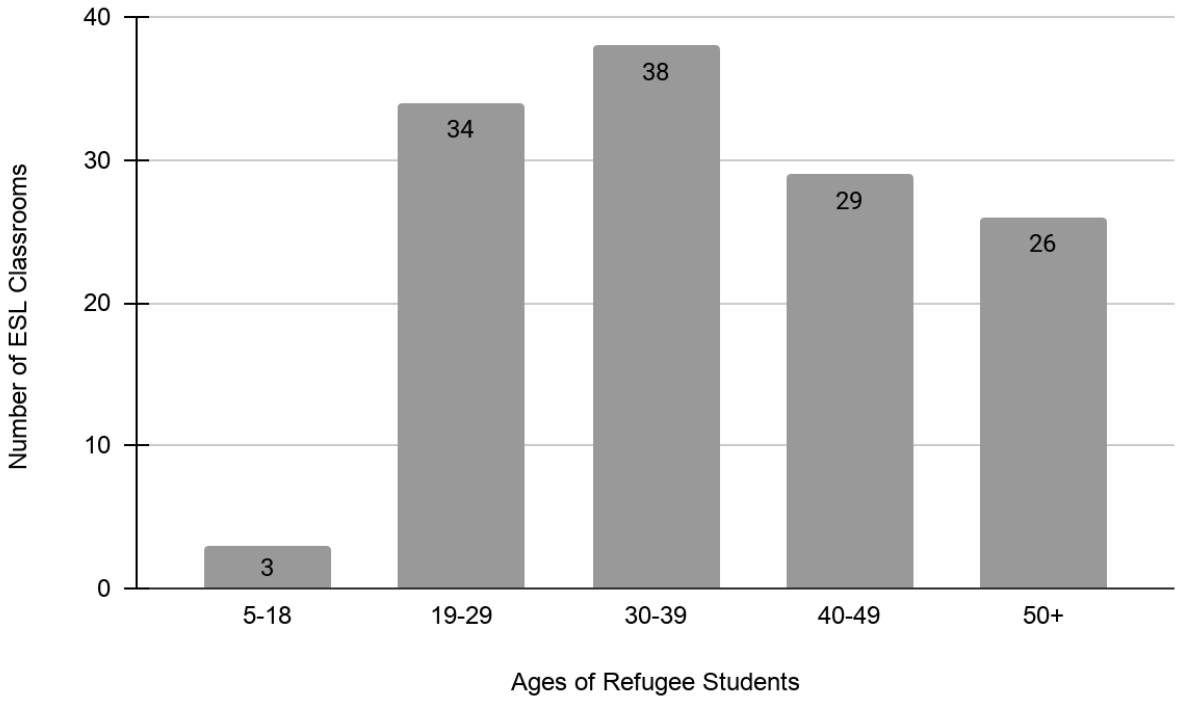
*Note*. Other languages reported by instructors include: Afar (2), Albanian (1), Amharic (1), Bambara (1), Bengali (1), Chin (2), Dari (14), Ewe (1), Farsi (7), French (10), Hausa (1), Khmer (1), Kotokoli (1), Kurdish (2), Lingala (2), Moldovan (1), Pashto (10), Portuguese (2), Rohingya (2), Romanian (1), Russian (6), Sango (1), Tamil (1), Thai (1), Tigrinya (2), Turkish (1), Twi (1), Ukranian (5), Urdu (4), Wolof (2), and Zomi (1).

Of the 34 instructors who shared information about their students' literacy levels, 26 (76.5%) reported that their classrooms included refugees from preliterate or nonliterate backgrounds, whereas eight (23.5%) said they did not.

The ages of refugee students in participants' classrooms also represented significant variation, as displayed in Figure 2.

**Figure 2**

*Ages of Refugee Students in ESL Classes*




*Note*. All classrooms that included refugee students between the ages of 5 and 18 also included adult students from at least one of the other four age groups listed.

Regarding the makeup of the ESL class more broadly, 12 of 41 (29.3%) instructors indicated that their ESL classroom populations consisted of primarily or exclusively refugee students. On the other hand, 26 (63.4%) instructors indicated that their classrooms included a mix of both refugees and immigrants. Of these, 21 stated that they were aware of which students were of refugee backgrounds when teaching. The remaining three instructors (7.3%) noted that their classrooms also included Special Immigrant Visa (SIV) holders and/or asylees.

### *3.1.2. Class Characteristics*

There was significant variation regarding the number of hours of ESL instruction that took place at each local affiliate location. Participants reported that their organizations offered their refugee clients anywhere from 2 to 35 hours of ESL instruction per week with an average of 11.7 hours per week. In turn, the average number of hours that a refugee client attended ESL classes also ranged from two to 35 hours per week with a similar average of 10.0 hours per week. 40 of the 41 (97.6%) participants indicated that classes were held on weekdays sometime between 9:00am and 5:00pm, with 29 (70.7%) indicating that this was the only time that classes were offered. The other 11 (22.0%) organizations also offered classes on weekdays after 5:00pm, and 2 of those (4.9%) also offered classes on weekends. Just one local affiliate only offered classes on weekdays after 5:00pm. Of the 34 instructors who reported the number of distinct levels of languages classes offered by their local affiliate organization, 28 (82.4%) offered three or more levels, while four (11.8%) offered two levels, and two (5.9%) offered one level.

Of the 33 instructors who shared whether or not their local affiliate conducts assessments for learning disabilities, 24 (72.7%) reported that they do, whereas four (12.1%) reported that they do not and five (15.2%) were unsure. In turn, of the 23 instructors who shared whether or not their organization accommodates learning disabilities, 12 (52.2%) reported that they do and 11 (47.8%) reported that they did not.

There were 35 instructors who provided details regarding how long on average refugee students remain in ESL classes with their local affiliate. Of these, 28 (80.0%) participants indicated that, on average, refugee students typically attend language classes with their local affiliate for less than one year. Half of these, or 14 (40.0%) of the instructors who responded to this question, noted that refugee students stop attending language classes within the first six

months of starting. In addition, seven participants (17.1%) reported that students stay for two to four years.

All 41 participants indicated some of the common reasons for which students missed classes prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. Employment obligations were the most commonly-cited reason, followed by a lack of transportation, a lack of child care, and physical/mental health concerns (Table 3).

**Table 3**

*Common Reasons Adult Refugees Miss ESL Classes*

| Reason | Number of Participants |
|---|---|
| Employment obligations | 34 |
| Lack of transportation | 25 |
| Lack of child care | 24 |
| Physical/mental health concerns | 24 |
| Appointments | 10 |
| Lack of interest | 2 |

### *3.1.3. Goals and Aims*

The stated goals of ESL classes for refugees also varied across locations (Table 4). The most common goals included survival English skills, literacy development for nonliterate and preliterate refugees, and English for employment, whereas few classes aimed at supporting full English proficiency. Instructors also reported some variation in terms of how these class goals are ultimately determined, as reflected in Table 5.

**Table 4**

*Goals of ESL Classes for Adult Refugees*

| Goal | Number of Participants |
|---|---|
| Survival English skills | 30 |
| Literacy development for nonliterate/preliterate refugees | 30 |
| English for employment | 28 |
| English for social purposes | 23 |
| Literacy development for refugees who are literate in a language that uses a non-Roman (i.e. "ABC") script (e.g. Arabic) | 20 |
| English for naturalization | 14 |
| Full English proficiency | 9 |

*Note*. 7 instructors did not provide information regarding goals of their ESL classes. Therefore, the above table only includes the responses of 34 instructors.

**Table 5**

*Determinants of Instructor Goals of ESL Classes for Adult Refugees*

| Goal | Number of Instructors |
|---|---|
| Instructor's own discretion | 31 |
| Local affiliate guidelines | 29 |
| Grant stipulations | 28 |
| Published textbooks/workbooks | 20 |
| Federal and/or state guidelines | 19 |
| Other | 2 |

It appears that, while instructors may often be limited in determining classroom goals by external factors such as local affiliate guidelines or grant stipulations, they do maintain a significant level of their own discretion in this process.

In addition to the broader goals of their classes, instructors were asked to designate the extent to which their classes aim to support development in eight different categories of linguistic skills, as reported in Table 6

**Table 6**

*Language Skills Supported in ESL Classrooms for Adult Refugees*

| Skill | Never | Rarely | Sometimes | Always |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Reading | 0 | 3 | 9 | 29 |
| Writing | 0 | 4 | 18 | 19 |
| Listening | 0 | 0 | 1 | 40 |
| Speaking | 0 | 0 | 2 | 39 |
| Pronunciation | 0 | 0 | 21 | 20 |
| Vocabulary | 0 | 0 | 5 | 36 |
| Grammar | 0 | 3 | 21 | 17 |
| Appropriate use of verbal and nonverbal language according to social context | 1 | 5 | 18 | 17 |

Generally speaking, it appears that ESL classes for adult refugees commonly address each of the eight types of linguistic skills asked about in this study. Listening and speaking appear to be the most consistently-supported skills, with skills related to reading, writing, grammar, and the appropriate use of verbal and nonverbal language according to social context being addressed with a slightly lower frequency.

### *3.1.4. Approaches*

As described above, instructors were presented with various unlabeled descriptions of different teaching approaches as described by Parrish (2019), including learner-centered teaching, the natural approach, and communicative language teaching. They were then asked the extent to which each of these concepts are central to the design and delivery of their ESL classes. Their responses to these items are reported in Table 7.

**Table 7**

*Pedagogical Approaches Used by ESL Instructors for Adult Refugees*

| Approach | Never | Rarely | Sometimes | Always |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Learner-Centered Teaching** | | | | |
| I allow students to share information about their native languages in the classroom. | 0 | 2 | 15 | 24 |
| I design lessons that are directly relevant to student's needs and interests. | 0 | 0 | 10 | 31 |
| I allow students to make choices about classroom content. | 0 | 10 | 24 | 7 |
| I allow students to make choices about classroom activities. | 0 | 8 | 27 | 6 |
| I listen for common themes that students discuss and incorporate those into my lessons. | 0 | 4 | 19 | 18 |
| I allow students to share information about their native cultures in the classroom. | 0 | 0 | 10 | 31 |
| I relate class content to students' native cultures. | 1 | 3 | 22 | 15 |
| **Natural Approach** | | | | |
| I allow students to remain silent until they feel ready to speak in class. | 0 | 7 | 20 | 14 |
| I plan for students to develop listening comprehension skills before speaking skills. | 2 | 11 | 19 | 9 |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Communicative Language Teaching** | | | | |
| I prioritize helping students make themselves understood more than I prioritize students' development of perfect language skills. | 0 | 0 | 6 | 35 |
| I incorporate authentic materials into instruction. | 0 | 0 | 12 | 29 |
| I structure my lessons in a way that maximizes interaction and communication between students. | 0 | 0 | 12 | 29 |
| I correct mistakes that students make when their message is easily understood.* | 0 | 27 | 13 | 1 |
| I correct mistakes that students make when speaking if what they are trying to communicate is unclear. | 0 | 1 | 28 | 12 |

*Note*. Unlike the responses to the rest of the items, the responses to the item marked with an asterisk are marked "never" or "rarely" when their selection aligns with the given approach.

### *3.1.5. Activities*

Participants reported some variation in terms of what determines the specific activities that are ultimately used in the ESL classroom. Of 41 participants, 39 (95.1%) reported having some level of discretion over what types of activities were used, including 14 (34.1%) who noted having full discretion over the selection of classroom activities without external guidelines to follow. An additional 25 (61.0%) noted having a certain level of discretion that was influenced or regulated by guidelines from the local affiliate or the state. The remaining 2 participants (4.9%) indicated that activities were determined fully by guidelines from the local affiliate and/or state.

Participants indicated a wide range of activities used in their ESL classrooms from a list that was provided to them (Table 8).

**Table 8**

*Types of Activities Used in ESL Classrooms for Adult Refugees*

| Activity Description | Never | Rarely | Sometimes | Always |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Communicative Language Teaching** | | | | |
| Students are given a particular task or problem to consider, and must talk with other students in the class in order to resolve it. | 0 | 7 | 26 | 8 |
| Students are given a particular prompt to discuss with a partner or in a group in order to exchange opinions and/or reach some type of agreement. | 3 | 6 | 24 | 8 |
| Students are all given a different piece of paper with a task written on it (e.g. find someone with the same favorite color) and are expected to ask questions to one another in order to find a partner or small group. | 9 | 8 | 18 | 6 |
| **Total Physical Response** | | | | |
| Students respond to commands to demonstrate listening comprehension. | 1 | 4 | 17 | 19 |
| **Audio-lingual Activities** | | | | |
| Students memorize answers to given questions and are expected to give them quickly when prompted by the instructor. | 14 | 17 | 8 | 2 |
| Students repeat sentences back to the instructor. | 3 | 9 | 19 | 10 |
| Students memorize lines of a dialogue and take turns reciting their roles. | 16 | 15 | 9 | 1 |
| **Content-Based Instruction** | | | | |
| Students learn about a given topic (e.g. systems of government) in English as a means to practice their language skills. | 3 | 4 | 15 | 19 |
| **Miscellaneous** | | | | |
| Students learn about the local community (e.g. city history, landmarks, culture, etc.) | 2 | 2 | 26 | 11 |
| Students participate in field trips into the community (e.g. to cultural events, historical sites, shopping centers, etc.)* | 7 | 13 | 18 | 1 |
| Students have discussions about preparing for and/or reflecting on English language use with native speakers* | 2 | 7 | 23 | 7 |

*Note*. Only 39 of the 41 participants provided responses to the two items marked with an asterisk.

### *3.1.6. Materials*

There were 39 participants who designated what determines the materials that are used in their classes. All 39 instructors reported having some level of discretion over which materials were used, including 15 (38.5%) who noted having full discretion over the selection of materials to use without external guidelines to follow. An additional 24 (61.5%) noted having a certain discretion level of discretion that was influenced or regulated by guidelines from the local affiliate or the state. Their responses in terms of what form these materials take are reported in Table 9.

**Table 9**

*Sources of Materials Used in ESL Classrooms for Adult Refugees*

| Source | Number of Participants |
|---|---|
| Worksheets produced by myself | 37 |
| Printed images | 35 |
| Published textbooks/workbooks | 34 |
| Online resources | 33 |
| Videos | 24 |
| Worksheets produced by our organization | 15 |

In addition to the sources of materials indicated in Table 9, instructors were asked the extent to which students use their devices (e.g. smartphones, tablets, laptops) as a medium of learning in the classroom. Of the 39 participants who responded to this question, 5 (12.8%) selected that this is “always” the case, 16 (41.0%) selected “sometimes”, 15 (38.5%) selected “rarely”, and three (7.7%) selected “never”.

### *3.1.7. Assessments*

Instructors were asked about assessment processes that were used both throughout and upon completion of their ESL class. Of the 41 respondents to these questions, 33 (80.5%) indicated that they assess student achievement throughout the course of their ESL class, whereas the remaining eight (19.5%) indicated that they do not. The specific areas within which these 33 instructors assess student achievement throughout the course of their classes is presented in Table 10. The ways in which these assessments were conducted are summarized in Table 11.

**Table 10**

*Language Skills Assessed Throughout ESL Classes for Adult Refugees*

| Skill | Number of Instructors |
|---|---|
| Reading | 26 |
| Writing | 22 |
| Listening | 26 |
| Speaking | 28 |
| Pronunciation | 7 |
| Vocabulary | 15 |
| Grammar | 11 |
| Appropriate use of verbal and nonverbal language according to social context | 5 |

**Table 11**

*Methods of Assessment Throughout ESL Classes for Adult Refugees*

| Method | Number of Instructors |
|---|---|
| Conversation-based quizzes/exams | 24 |
| Reading comprehension quizzes/exams | 20 |
| Writing-based quizzes/exams | 20 |

| | |
|---|---|
| Language portfolios | 3 |
| Other | 7 |

*Note*. Many instructors used a combination of different methods to assess student achievement.

Of these 41 instructors, 28 (68.3%) indicated that they assess student achievement upon completion of their ESL class, whereas the remaining 13 (31.7%) indicated that they do not. The specific areas within which these 28 instructors assess student achievement upon completion of the class is presented in Table 12. The ways in which these assessments were conducted are summarized in Table 13.

**Table 12**

*Language Skills Assessed After Completion of ESL Classes for Adult Refugees*

| Skill | Number of Instructors |
|---|---|
| Reading | 21 |
| Writing | 18 |
| Listening | 21 |
| Speaking | 22 |
| Pronunciation | 8 |
| Vocabulary | 15 |
| Grammar | 9 |
| Appropriate use of verbal and nonverbal language according to social context | 5 |

**Table 13**

*Methods of Assessment After Completion of ESL Classes for Adult Refugees*

| Method | Number of Instructors |
|---|---|
| Conversation-based quizzes/exams | 18 |

| | |
|---|---|
| Reading comprehension quizzes/exams | 16 |
| Writing-based quizzes/exams | 17 |
| Language portfolios | 3 |
| Other | 6 |

*Note*. Many instructors used a combination of different methods to assess student achievement.

### 3.2. Interviews

The qualitative information gathered from interviewees through a process detailed above was clustered around three main themes, each related to one of the central research questions. First, participants elaborated upon their lesson planning process, addressing the first research question, "What are the resources that ESL instructors for adult refugees use? For whom are these resources designed? If there is a mismatch, how does this relate to their lesson planning process?" Next, participants described how a typical day in the classroom looked with respect to class activities, addressing the third research question, "How do the types of activities employed in these in-person ESL classes compare to what the most relevant available literature suggests would be the most effective activities?". Finally, participants discussed a series of barriers to refugee clients' long-term participation in ESL classes and how they have adapted their programs accordingly, addressing the fourth research question, "In what ways do the structural barriers to accessing in-person ESL classes impact the effectiveness of in-person ESL pedagogy for adult refugees as delivered in practice today? How do instructors address these barriers?"

#### *3.2.1. Resources and Lesson Planning*

The instructors in this study were largely unaware of any resources for lesson planning designed specifically for teaching ESL to adult refugee populations. The more common resources that instructors did report using included online resources for adult ESL from *Literacy*

*Minnesota* (mentioned by three participants), as well as online resources from *ESL Library* and *Longman Literacy* books (each mentioned by two participants). Additional books that instructors reported using include *Side by Side*, *Future Intro*, *Ventures 2*, and *English for Better Jobs*. Additional online resources that participants used included *LESLAA.org* and the Massachusetts *English Language Proficiency Standards for Adult Education*. All of these resources were designed for use with general adult language learners. Because of this challenge in finding resources and materials for adult refugee language learners, four instructors explicitly reported experiencing difficulty with at least one aspect of planning lessons that would adequately meet their students' needs. Participant 12, for instance, explained, "I had already been teaching for close to fifteen years, but I worked at private language schools for a very different cohort of students… When I started working in a community-based environment specifically with refugees… I found it very challenging."

In turn, instructors have utilized a few different approaches to circumvent the challenges posed by the apparent lack of empirically-based ESL classroom materials to support their students' specific situations. The most common approach to lesson planning, however, relied upon resources for general adult ESL as a foundation upon which instructors expanded, leveraging personal experiences and creativity in order to bridge the gap between the populations for which these resources were designed and the refugee populations in their own classroom. Participant 8, who used some online resources and "Students with Interrupted Formal Education" (SIFE) training as a foundation for her planning, explained that, "it's really getting to know your students in the classroom, getting to know the students that you're working with on a daily basis and what their goals are." Participant 4 similarly described the value of his second role as an

employment coordinator in understanding the types of conversations for which many of his refugee students will need to be prepared.

Two instructors also shared the role that their own experiences with language overseas played in the process. Referring *Longman Literacy* and *Literacy Minnesota* for materials supporting literacy development in adult ESL with which she was familiar, participant 16 described, "it was basically pulling on my experience [being amongst people learning languages overseas] and bits and pieces from here and there." In a similar fashion, Participant 22 stressed the importance of having personally lived overseas:

> I think that's a strong resource that we have—that our entire staff has lived overseas and understands, not the refugee side personally, but understands the immigrant side. But then they work with refugees regularly, so they can draw from that experience as well.

Not only had Participant 22 spent many years overseas himself, but was also able to brainstorm amongst his network of coworkers who had lived abroad in various countries as well.

One of the instructors, whose ESL course was primarily concerned with supporting adult refugees' literacy development, went so far as to write the adaptations they made to pre-existing resources for general adult ESL into a formalized curriculum. To create this, Participant 18 explained, "we just looked at what do we think our students need to know, what do we know from our own experience from teaching adult ESL." Further, referencing their initial lack of understanding in how to best support adult refugee students from preliterate or nonliterature backgrounds, she shared, "I have my master's in TESOL and I never studied this. Why did nobody teach me this? I guess not all teachers encounter it. But, most of us do—if you're in the refugee world, you're gonna probably see it."

Participant 12 was the only instructor who reported having success in finding a resource that provided guidance for teaching languages to adult refugees. The document, *Making It Real: Teaching Pre-literate Adult Refugee Students*, was created and shared online by a nonprofit organization out of Tacoma, Washington. Participant 12 described using general adult ESL books, including *Longman Literacy, Future,* and *Ventures 2*, as a foundation, and used the *Making It Real* document as a resource to bridge the gap and meet clients' specific needs. Therefore, like the curriculum developed by the organization of Participant 18, *Making It Real* represents another isolated attempt to formalize best practices for adult refugee ESL instruction. It is important to recognize, though, that this document largely cites textbooks and resources informed by research for general adult ESL students, including *Longman Literacy*, as well as an assortment of sources about common refugee cultures of origin. In addition, it appears that the contents of *Making It Real* were developed without any supporting data that was collected with direct considerations for adult refugee ESL learners. Therefore, its viability as a guide for effective instruction with this particular population remains unclear.

Four of the instructors reported that they do not consistently make use of any print or online resources to guide their instruction; instead, they were either taught the general flow of how the class should be organized by their organization or relied on personal judgment with the students who attended class. Participant 15, for example, explained that she tried to make use of some online blogs and resources from *ESL Library*, but did not find them to be "applicable" to her students. As a result, she explained, "I go more from what feels like it's working in class."

### *3.2.2. Activities*

In order to understand which types of activities instructors used in their classes to inform the third research question of how these activities compare to what the most relevant available

literature suggests are most effective, instructors were asked to describe a typical day in their class. When participants were told to walk the interviewer through the typical structure of a lesson focusing on the types of activities that they incorporate, they presented a very wide range of responses. From a sample of 11 instructors with different training backgrounds and whose classes include diverse student populations with different goals, such a great variety of responses would be expected. As reflected in the preceding section on resources and lesson planning, activities were largely informed by the personal experiences, creativity, and adaptability of instructors. In effect, the types of activities present in these ESL classrooms tended to be context-dependent and ranged on various scales, from more structured to more open-ended, from less communicative to more communicative, and from more input-based to more output-based.

First, among the many types of activities reported, some tended to be more formally structured whereas others tended to be more open-ended. For example, Participant 1 described a few types of more structured activities that they used with their particular group of students when studying grammar. Some examples included the repetition of sentences and dictations, matching one half of a sentence with its corresponding second half, or completing the rest of a pre-written dialogue while incorporating the target grammatical structure(s). Yet, when students transitioned from grammar to life skills, Participant 1 transitioned from this more structured approach to a more open-ended one. In this scenario, in a lesson about food and grocery shopping, they might engage students in an open discussion, posing questions about where they go, what they buy, and what they like to cook. Participant 15 adjusted their teaching in a similar fashion. They first described a structured activity, where they might cut pre-written dialogue into strips and have students work in groups and race to put the strips in the correct order. Then, later on, in a more

open-ended activity, students could be put into groups to discuss biographies they had written about themselves in preparing for a future job search.

Second, many activities could also be placed at various points along a spectrum from less communicative to more communicative. Participant 8 shared an activity where the instructor passes out printed images of different places around their city to students in pairs and tells them to "describe this picture" and "tell anything you can about this picture". While this activity is not necessarily highly communicative, as both students see the picture and, likely, the information being exchanged, it would be very effective at allowing students to practice the output of new vocabulary and to develop a greater familiarity with their local community. It is also possible that students could share something more personal and communicative (e.g. "I went there last week!") about the place in question, depending on if they have acquired the necessary language skills to communicate their ideas. On the other side of the spectrum, Participant 18 described a few activities that would force students to share novel information. In one activity, the instructor passes out housing advertisements to students sitting in pairs, instructing them to each read the advertisements and arrive at a consensus about their favorite. The instructor might ask, "If you had to choose one of these apartments or houses to live in, which one would you choose and why?" Further, students might be asked to write their own advertisements for different houses, after which the class would take a vote to answer the question, "Which one would you choose to rent?"

Third, activities that instructors shared exhibited a wide range from being more input-based to more output-based, oftentimes with the output activities building off of a foundation established in the input activities. For instance, Participant 16 explained that they used a lot of TPR activities where they would name different things and ask students to point to

them. In a similar way, Participant 18 described using different types of flashcard card games to reinforce and practice new vocabulary words to which students had just been introduced. In both of these cases, the instructors were working with students of relatively-low English and literacy skills, so these input activities were used to set the stage for more complicated activities. In another activity, Participant 18 described using flashcards with phrases such as "phone number" and "date of birth" written on them, which students were to first take turns reading aloud and, in a subsequent round, to actually provide the information listed. Using that same target vocabulary, activities would become more and more output-based, in an effort "to build that sequence of skills" in the words of Participant 18. Later on, for example, students could be given an actual form from a local health department and asked to locate and fill out the items that they learned in class. Participant 18 concluded in explaining, "We try to do a lot of those things where we're recognizing the info and then moving through a sequence to be able to use it."

Finally, regardless of where they might fit in on the spectrums explored above, it was clear that instructors valued activities that promoted the process of community-building among their students. Two instructors shared that this is often how they like to start their lessons. Participant 22 incorporates "emotional and cultural-based icebreakers", where students engage in small discussions to share ideas about their best days or worst days in the United States so far, or to share their experiences out in the community "when [they] didn't understand what people were saying", which is in line with the ideas and suggestions of Norton Peirce (1995, p. 27). They further explained that "it [engages] them early in the class that they can express more than just a like or a dislike or an interesting fact." Participant 12 shared another type of icebreaker activity used to promote the "key goals" of "communication, community building, and socialization" at the start of lessons at their organization. Participant 12 described:

> We would do what we call a conversation wheel. This was two circles of students—one inner circle and one outer circle. The outer circle would walk randomly and we would stop them and then they would talk to that person in front of them for about a minute. And then after a minute we would have them do it again and we would do it three times. So they would get a chance to meet people from the other class. They would get to talk to their classmates.

They went on to describe how it could be effective at challenging beginner students to communicate their ideas or challenging intermediate students to communicate with people at lower levels. All students were encouraged to speak English during the activity, of course, but it was decided that if native languages were used for a little bit, it was acceptable since it was still meeting the goals of community building and socialization.

### *3.2.3. Barriers to Long-Term Attendance and Working Solutions*

The four primary reasons why adult refugees stopped attending ESL classes that their instructors shared during the interview process fell into four general categories, including (1) employment, (2) lack of child care, (3) inadequate transportation, and (4) program design.

The most commonly-reported reason for adult refugees discontinuing their involvement in local affiliates' ESL classes was finding their first job, having been reported by 8 of the 11 instructors interviewed. Job schedules often conflicted with ESL class schedules. However, even when this was not the case, "[they] have families and… between [their] time working and time being home," many refugees found it difficult to find room in their busy schedules to attend classes, according to Participant 22. Participant 18 communicated witnessing a similar sentiment, in explaining:

> A lot of people—if they're working first shift—they'll go to an evening class, but some people are just like, 'I'm tired, I have to work and take care of my family, and I don't have time to go to my English class.'

While gaining employment was certainly viewed by some instructors as a marker of success, two instructors described how taking a first job and dropping out of ESL classes can position adult refugees in a challenging dilemma. Specifically, some instructors believe that if students were able to stay in classes longer, they would ultimately be able to attain higher-quality jobs. According to Participant 8:

> Clients have to get jobs very quickly, and a lot of clients get put in very low-level positions, whereas if they where able to study English longer… I think that they would have better job prospects and be better off for their whole family's situation here in the US.

Participant 15 echoed this thought, describing the situation as a "constant battle" and believing that "you're gonna be in a dead-end position if you just go for that first job." They further explained, "It was hard to get students to look down the road. It's like, 'well, I can make this money now." Lastly, because employment posed such a consistent barrier to attending classes long-term, two instructors noted that the unemployed elderly were some of the students who stayed in language programs the longest.

The problems associated with employment often appear to be further complicated by a second common barrier: the lack of adequate transportation. Many of the students make use of public transportation, especially buses, to get to classes. A few instructors explained that, for some students, the one-way bus ride to class can last upwards of an hour—a tiring experience, especially for those who also work or bring children along. According to Participant 8, weather

may also impact students abilities' to travel to and from classes, having observed that attendance in their local affiliate's ESL classes tend to triple in the summer months. To try to help alleviate some of the transportation-related barriers, two instructors mentioned providing students with bus fares. Participant 18 also noted that, when they have the resources to do so, their organization holds classes off-site, within walking distance of students' homes.

A third barrier that often complicates consistent and long-term participation in the ESL classroom involves the lack of childcare; that is, some adult refugees may find it difficult or impossible to attend classes because either they or their partner are working, if not both, and they do not have anyone to look after their children. Participant 1 observed that this was especially the case during the summer months; mothers were often unable to attend classes during the summer months while their children were not in school. Similar to the question of employment, Participant 1 explained that older students often tend to stay engaged in classes longer because they do not have children at home. In order to address these issues, Participant 12 noted that their organization did make efforts to provide childcare services while classes were in session. Whereas this did indeed help some students overcome childcare-related barriers, some problems did persist. Further highlighting the problems' interaction with transportation-related barriers, they explained, "We offer childcare for the clients so that it's not a barrier for them to come, but it can still be a challenge getting them to get the kids dressed and on the bus, and if they live an hour away… That can become a barrier."

The fourth most common barrier to adult refugees' long-term engagement with ESL classes is the simple fact that programs are oftentimes not designed to support students long-term. Three of the instructors mentioned that their ESL programs were only designed to last for the initial 12-week Reception and Placement period; Participant 12 explained that, by the end

of this period, students are expected to "have settled into their homes" and to "be on track for employment if they haven't already received employment." As highlighted by Participant 22, it is often at the end of the first 12 weeks that local affiliates no longer receive Reception and Placement funding from the DOS, whose stated goal is "to achieve economic self-sufficiency through employment as soon as possible after their arrival in the United States" (DOS, n.d.). Moreover, due to the ongoing nature of refugee resettlement, there are rarely, if ever, discrete cohorts of students. Aside from beginning classes with a wide range of background knowledge and life experiences, students are constantly arriving at different times. To address this challenge, Participant 4 often tries to structure their lessons in a non-sequential way such that "anyone from any country that speaks another language can just walk in and get something from the class". Participant 18 similarly explained, "each lesson was really self-contained because people were not always able to come every day."

There were a few other less-common barriers to long-term attendance that instructors shared, in addition to these four. A few instructors suspected that a lack of interest or motivation to learn English was responsible for some of the attrition they witnessed in their classes. Participant 15 tried to combat these issues by inviting the organization's employment team to come into classes and talk about goal-setting. Participant 20 found that students with a lower starting level of English were often less engaged over the long term, compared with their peers who started with a higher command of English, "maybe because it's just easier to see the light at the end of the tunnel." On a similar note, a couple of participants found that students with little to no prior education also faced challenges as a result of a lack of confidence and a lack of understanding of general classroom procedures that their peers with more prior education more readily understood.

After being asked the barriers hindering adult refugees' long-term attendance in ESL classes, instructors were also asked about any other circumstances that seem to help keep students engaged with classes over a greater period of time. The most common response, given by seven of the instructors, centered on the utmost importance of building a strong sense of community among the students and instructors in the language classroom. Participant 18 explained, "I think it's the social aspect really. They come and they see their friends and we try to really focus on building community." Participant 18 then shared:

> There also tends to be in a lot of our classes some social time at the beginning where people are just situating or saying hi to their friends, that kind of thing. That always was an important component I think as well.

The importance of this community component was echoed by Participant 12, who explained:

> They're new in the country. We have a lot of single men from Africa, for example, who come and they don't have a community here of people they already know, or family, and so our classes become like a lifeline, and among all the stressors in their daily lives, usually English class is the one place they come and they leave their worries at the door and they just have fun for a couple hours. Then, class is over and they go back to all the practical realities of their life. But, for those two hours, they can just forget about it.

Participant 8 described a number of tactics that were used to help promote engagement in this class community, including the incorporation of trips into the local community (e.g. museums), journal-making exercises, and even knitting lessons.

Taking this one step further, Participant 16 explained that their ESL literacy classes are always paired with "integration class" on another day of the week in which students "get to talk about culture shock, and 'how does the system work?'" They went on to explain, "You need that

support group around you of other people moving along with you so that you don't feel like you're alone in this world. That gives you the confidence."

## 4. Discussion

### 4.1. The Question of Resources

The first of the four research questions posed in this study asked: what are the resources that ESL instructors for adult refugees use, for whom are these resources designed, and, if there is a mismatch, how does this relate to their lesson planning process? The juxtaposition of questionnaire and interview data provides a preliminary understanding of how this question of resources tends to play out in ESL classes for adult refugees and what can be done to better support these ESL instructors with more effective resources for teaching.

It has become clear that there is no single textbook, website, or other type of resource consistently used to guide instructors' lesson planning. Instead, instructors often use an assortment of online and print resources, the vast majority of which are designed for general adult English language learners; they have not necessarily been crafted with considerations for students navigating the demands of an immigration context, let alone those facing the further challenges posed by forced migration. Moreover, much of the research informing their design was conducted neither with the aim of understanding how to best support language acquisition among immigrants or refugees, nor with immigrant or refugee participants to whom any results can henceforth be confidently generalized.

There is, therefore, an evident mismatch between the resources available to these instructors and the demographics of their students. Because these resources tend to inadequately align with the background knowledge and immediate needs of their students, it is quite common for instructors to experience some difficulty in their lesson planning processes. Unable to rely on established resources, instructors continue to demonstrate admirable ingenuity and creativity in

leveraging personal experiences to build upon the resources they are given to meet the needs of their students. In doing so, despite being burdened with the responsibility of independently developing and experimenting different pedagogical approaches—a seemingly unofficial "second job" far beyond the expectations of a typical teaching position—instructors have made and continue to make extraordinarily impactful learning communities for these adult learners.

The challenges perpetuated by lack of resources, however, does not end at lesson planning, but instead extends into the availability of appropriate materials that can be used in the classroom. All instructors in this study reported having some level of discretion over what materials are to be used, over a third of whom have complete discretion without outside requirements to meet. Interestingly, the most common sources of classroom materials used by instructors in this study took the form of self-produced worksheets and images, followed by published textbooks or workbooks and online resources, presumably similar, if not identical, to the resources used for lesson planning.

It appears that, as a whole, instructors for adult refugees across the country find themselves in a constant state of theorizing, experimenting, and producing the resources to be used in their own classrooms, in addition to their primary teaching duties. In other words, the situation described Reder et al. (1984) whereby "appropriate materials, assessment procedures, and staff training activities are designed over and over again independently in individual classrooms and programs" seems to have remained constant over the past few decades (p. 64). Therefore, to alleviate some of the undue burden from these instructors and to ensure that the students are receiving the highest quality language education that can be provided, more formal and concentrated research efforts in determining and materializing best practices for supporting adult refugees' language education could be of great value. In this regard, it is essential that

instructors be provided with an empirically-supported framework of language instruction that can be used in classrooms containing refugee students with extraordinarily diverse backgrounds. This is particularly urgent for contexts of literacy development, considering the fact that 76.5% of instructors in this study reported having adult refugee students from a range of preliterate and nonliterate backgrounds, yet face difficulties in understanding how to best support them, even after earning a master's degree in TESOL.

Since resettlement organizations are unlikely to have access to the resources needed to support different levels of classes for every student, we must learn how to ensure that the needs of all students can be met over a certain period of time. Taking into account the great diversity of adult refugee populations, the incorporation of an empirically-informed needs assessment may be beneficial as a part of the process. It is clear that getting to know each of their students well—a lengthy process, especially considering the relatively-short period of time that students are able to remain in class—is of utmost importance for instructors when designing effective lesson plans.

### 4.2. Approaches in Practice

The second research question asked how the approaches to teaching in-person ESL held by American resettlement organizations compare to what the most relevant available literature suggests would be the most effective approaches. The data collected to respond to this question are quite promising. In the questionnaire, instructors were provided with 14 items inquiring about the extent to which their approaches to teaching align with learner-centered teaching, a natural approach, or communicative language teaching (CLT), with responses having been reported in Table 7. They were not presented with the category of approach to which each item belonged. Of these 14 items, seven aimed to measure the extent to which instructors adhere to

learner-centered teaching, two measured adherence to a natural approach, and five measured adherence to CLT.

Learner-centered teaching was very consistently reported among the instructors' approaches. In fact, 90.2% of responses indicated that the 7 conceptual items measuring adherence to learner-centered teaching were "sometimes" or "always" present in the design and delivery of ESL classes. Of the items describing a learner-centered approach, many simultaneously suggest the value of having a sense of community among students; for instance, it expects instructors to allow students to share information about their own languages and cultures, while bridging connections between this information and classroom content. Interestingly, instructors seem to have already recognized this need for a strong sense of community, having shared their beliefs in its inherent value as well as a variety of strategies they use to help foster its establishment.

Instructors' approaches to teaching overwhelmingly aligned with CLT as well. In responding to the 5 items measuring adherence to CLT, 92.7% of instructor responses indicated that given CLT concepts were "sometimes" or "always" prominent in the design and delivery of their ESL classes.[6] Moreover, on the flip side, not a single instructor indicated that any of the 5 CLT concepts were "never" prominent in their classes' design and delivery. A similar pattern emerged with regard to the natural approach; in this case, 75.6% of instructor responses indicated that principles of the natural approach were "sometimes" or "always" prominent in their class design.

[6] The 92.7% value was calculated after reverse coding the responses to the following item: "I correct mistakes that students make when their message is easily understood". Because a response of "never" or "rarely" would indicate that an instructor is following principles of CLT, such responses were counted as a "sometimes" or "always" when calculating the extent to which the instructors adhere to CLT.

These results suggest that instructors are largely following approaches that the most relevant available literature would indeed suggest to be most effective. While instructors' approaches to language teaching are trending in a very positive direction, it is also important to examine the concrete activities used in their classes.

### 4.3. Activities in Practice

The third research question asked how the types of activities employed in these in-person ESL classes compare to what the most relevant available literature suggests would be the most effective activities. With 95.1% of instructors having some level of discretion over the types of activities used in the classroom, it is certainly promising to see that, similar to instructors' approaches to teaching, the activities that they incorporate also trend heavily towards aligning with what the literature suggests to be most effective.

Table 8 reflects the extent to which instructors implement some types of activities that align with each of the four types of activities explored—CLT, TPR, audio-lingual, and content-based instruction. As described above, the most relevant available literature for this student population would suggest that CLT, TPR, and content-based instruction would guide the most effective types of activities; audio-lingual activities, when used alone, tend to be of a lesser value. The results shown in Table 8 suggest an exceptional alignment with these suggestions. With regard to the three most effective types of activities, 87.8% of responses indicate that participants "always" or "sometimes" incorporate TPR activities, 83.0% indicate that they "always" or "sometimes" incorporate CBI, and 73.2% indicate that they "always" or "sometimes" use CLT. Moreover, qualitative interview data have demonstrated that instructors are able to skillfully modify each of these types of activities along various spectra in order to meet the needs of their diverse student groups. It was also found that 39.8% of instructors

"always" or "sometimes" use activities that could be categorized as audio-lingual. The qualitative interview data does suggest that many of these more audio-lingual activities, such as repetition and the use of structured dialogues, are used purposefully to meet specific language goals (e.g. to provide targeted input or pronunciation practice). While more intensive and sustained classroom observation could be of significant value in more precisely addressing this research question, these data do suggest a general adherence to classroom activities that are indeed supported by the most relevant available literature.

### 4.4. Addressing Structural Barriers

The final research question asked in what ways the structural barriers to accessing in-person ESL classes impact the effectiveness of in-person ESL pedagogy for adult refugees as delivered in practice today and how instructors address these barriers. The results from both the questionnaires and interviews have provided significant insight into the challenges created by these structural barriers, what instructors are currently doing in response, and potential future directions.

As reflected in both Table 3 and qualitative interview data, the most common structural barriers that adult refugees face in terms of accessing ESL classes and remaining engaged with them long-term include employment obligations, a lack of transportation, a lack of childcare, physical/mental health concerns, and the intentionally-brief design of some language programs. It is important to note that the first four of these five barriers were originally described in the ORR's 1984 report and remain unresolved 36 years later. While different organizations have made some isolated attempts at addressing this problem (e.g. by offering in-house childcare services), more innovative and sustainable attempts at resolving these issues on a larger scale could be worthwhile.

The interplay between the barriers of employment and program design offers some particularly unique insight in terms of helping adult refugees develop higher levels of English proficiency. Employment obligations served as the most commonly-cited structural barrier to attending class, having been reported by 83.0% of instructors to cause their students to miss class or drop out from language programs entirely. This is perhaps further reinforced by the fact that 70.7% of the local affiliates surveyed only offered classes on weekdays during standard business hours. In addition to this, it is worth remembering that the stated goal of the DOS' Reception and Placement program is "to achieve economic self-sufficiency through employment as soon as possible after their arrival in the United States". Thus, it does not come as a surprise that it is quite common for grant-dependent local affiliates to be unable to offer ESL classes beyond the clients' first few months in the country, or after they receive their first job. It is quite plausible, therefore, that the combination of these two factors—employment and program design—is a significant reason behind the fact that 80.0% of instructors reported that their students remain in language classes for less than a year, half of whom stop attending within the first 6 months. While students might indeed be able to find a job within this time, it would be unreasonable to assume that their English has reached a point of proficiency (especially for students without any prior education or literacy skills), or that students could not benefit significantly from continued language education. After all, employment is just one marker of immigrant integration (Ager & Strang, 2008). Students may still require English language support in order to access social connection and the education, health, and housing markers of integration.

It is clear that the inability of adult refugees to remain in these classes over an extended period of time is due in great part to the interaction of employment obligations and program design. Since being reported several decades ago by Reder et al. (1984), employment persists as

the most commonly-cited barrier to attendance and long-term engagement with ESL classes. The majority of these classes still take place on weekdays between the hours of 9:00 am and 5:00 pm, with only a small minority offering evening classes and just 4.9% offering weekend classes.

A similar challenge presents itself in understanding how to resolve the dilemma whereby ESL classes are largely forced to operate through ongoing open enrollment, rather than upon a traditional cohort-based model. In this way, ESL instructors for adult refugees are faced with a very unique situation where it is exceptionally difficult to follow a single sequential class structure that can allow all students to develop a singular foundation to build upon throughout the rest of the course. Any attempt at formalizing best practices for teaching adult refugees must take this into careful consideration, just as several participants in this study have already begun to do.

### 4.5. Limitations

The present study has been completed with a number of limitations. First, in terms of data collection, it is important to note that questionnaires were administered during December of 2020 and January of 2021 and that interviews were conducted during February of 2021. Since ESL classes have largely stopped taking place in-person since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in March of 2020, several months and the drastic change in ESL program delivery to an online format separated the period of data collection and the time of in-person teaching that participants were asked to recall. Further, because of this fact, the practicality of the results discussed here and suggestions for change assume a return back to normalcy in the near future. Considering the fact that these instructors broaden their teaching skills through experimenting with different approaches, it would be naïve to assume that nothing has been learned in the past year that will impact future teaching.

Second, the participants included in this study consisted solely of employees of those organizations who responded to the researcher's online recruitment attempt. It remains unclear how those organizations that did not respond to recruitment attempts may compare to those who elected to participate in this study.

Finally, it is essential to note that the only organizations included in this study were local affiliates of official VOLAGs who offered in-house ESL classes to their clients. Many local affiliates instead refer their clients to other organizations (e.g. community colleges) for ESL courses, or some students may elect to transfer to such organizations after completing or instead of the in-house classes. Future research may investigate how the experiences of adult refugees receiving their ESL education through these organizations compares to those relying on local affiliates.

## 5. Conclusions

While there is some variation in terms of both the pedagogical approaches and activities that ESL instructors for adult refugees use, both appear to broadly align with what the most relevant available literature suggests are most effective. The lack of research and empirically-based educational resources and materials has allowed instructors to demonstrate admirable ingenuity and creativity in leveraging personal experiences to build upon the resources they are given to meet the needs of their students. Nevertheless, to alleviate the burden placed on instructors to constantly theorize, experiment with, and produce new approaches, more concentrated research efforts to develop empirically-informed pedagogical materials to address the particular needs of refugee learners could be of tremendous value. This study has captured some of the progress that instructors have already made in this respect and identifies areas in need of further research. As the number of people experiencing forced displacement continues to

rise into the 21st century, having a more nuanced understanding of how to effectively support adult refugees' language acquisition will allow for more meaningful experiences of immersion and integration.

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## Appendix A

The following questions will ask about the organization with which you serve as an English language instructor for refugees.

Please identify the region of the United States within which your resettlement organization is located, as defined by the US Census Bureau.

- New England (CT, ME, MA, NJ, RI, VT)
- Mid-Atlantic (NJ, NY, PA)
- East North Central (IL, IN, MI, OH, WI)
- West North Central (IA, KS, MN, MO, NE, ND, SD)
- South Atlantic (DE, FL, GA, MD, NC, SC, VA, WV, DC)
- East South Central (AL, KY, MS, TN)
- West South Central (AR, LA, OK, TX)
- Mountain (AZ, CO, ID, MT, NV, NM, UT, WY)
- Pacific (AK, CA, HI, OR, WA)

To the best of your knowledge, how many refugees was your organization serving prior to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic (before March 2020)?

- 1-10
- 11-50
- 51-99
- 100+
- Don’t know

To the best of your knowledge, how many refugees is your organization serving today?

- 1-10
- 11-50
- 51-99
- 100+
- Don’t know

The following questions will ask about your educational and professional background.

Please select the highest level of education that you have completed.

- No high school
- Some high school
- High school/GED
- Some college
- Associate’s degree
- Bachelor’s degree

- Master's degree
- Doctorate degree
- Professional degree (e.g. medicine, law)

[If "Associate's degree" is selected]:
What was your associate's degree concentration(s)? _____

[If "Bachelor's degree" is selected]:
What was your Bachelor's degree major(s)? _____
What was your associate's degree concentration (if applicable)? _____

[If "Master's degree" is selected]:
What was your Master's degree concentration? _____
What was your Bachelor's degree major(s)? _____
What was your associate's degree concentration (if applicable)? _____

[If "Doctorate degree" is selected]:
What field is your doctorate degree in? _____
What was your Master's degree concentration? _____
What was your Bachelor's degree major(s)? _____
What was your associate's degree concentration (if applicable)? _____

[If "Professional degree (e.g. medicine, law) is selected]:
What field is your professional degree in? _____
What was your Master's degree concentration? _____
What was your Bachelor's degree major(s)? _____
What was your associate's degree concentration (if applicable)? _____

Are you a certified ESL instructor for adults?

- Yes
- No

Have you received formal training in adult literacy instruction, outside of a refugee resettlement organization?

- Yes
- No

Which of the following best describes the nature of your position teaching English to refugees prior to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic (before March 2020)?

- Full-time paid

- Part-time paid
- Volunteer
- Other (explain): _____

Approximately how many years have you served in this position? _____

Approximately how many years of experience teaching ESL did you have prior to this position? _____

The next set of questions will ask about the students in the English language classrooms that were held in-person prior to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic (before March 2020).

Which of the following best describes the student population of your English class(es)?

- Exclusively refugees
- A mix of immigrants and refugees
- Don't know
- Other: _____

[If "A mix of immigrants and refugees" is selected]:
Are you aware of which students are of a refugee background when teaching?

- Yes
- No

To the best of your knowledge, what is the approximate age range of the refugee students in your classroom? Select all that apply.

- 5-18
- 19-29
- 30-39
- 40-49
- 50+

To the best of your knowledge, are there any refugee students in your classroom who are either preliterate (i.e. literacy is not common in the home culture) or nonliterate (i.e. literacy is common in the home culture, but they have not yet developed literacy skills)?

- Yes
- No

To the best of your knowledge, please select the native languages of the refugee students in your classroom. Select all that apply.

- Arabic

- Nepali
- Somali
- Sgaw Karen
- Spanish
- Swahili
- Burmese
- Chaldean
- Armenian
- Kinyarwanda
- Other: _____
- Don't know

The next set of questions will ask about the structure of the English language classrooms that were held in-person prior to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic (before March 2020).

To the best of your knowledge, how many hours of language instruction were scheduled and offered per week to the average refugee client? _____

To the best of your knowledge, how many hours per week did the average refugee client attend class? _____

When did your organization offer English language classes prior to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic (before March 2020)? Select all that apply.

- Weekdays: between 9am-5pm
- Weekdays: after 5pm
- Weekends

To the best of your knowledge, why did students miss class sessions prior to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic (before March 2020)? Select all that apply.

- Employment obligations
- Lack of transportation
- Lack of child care
- Physical/mental health concerns
- Don't know
- Other: _____

To the best of your knowledge, how long does the average student stay in your organization's language classes?

- Less than 6 months
- Between 6 months and 1 year

- 2-4 years
- 5+ years

How many distinct levels of language classes (e.g. beginner, intermediate, advanced) does your organization offer?

- 1
- 2
- 3+

Which of the following best describe the goals of the language classes offered by your organization? Select all that apply.

- Survival English skills
- English for employment
- English for naturalization
- English for social purposes
- Full English proficiency
- Literacy development for nonliterate/preliterate refugees
- Literacy development for refugees who are literate in a language that uses a non-Roman (i.e. "ABC") script (e.g. Arabic)

Does your organization assess for learning disabilities among its refugee clients?

- Yes
- No
- Don’t know

Does your organization accommodate learning disabilities among its refugee clients?

- Yes
- No
- Don’t know

This next set of questions will ask about the goals of your English language class.

How are the goals of your classroom determined? Select all that apply.

- Federal/state guidelines
- Organization guidelines
- Grant stipulations
- My own discretion
- Published textbooks/workbook
- Other

How often does your class aim to support development in each of the following areas?

| | Never | Rarely | Sometimes | Always |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Reading proficiency | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| Writing proficiency | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| Listening comprehension | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| Speaking proficiency | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| Pronunciation | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| Grammar | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| Vocabulary | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| Appropriate use of verbal and nonverbal language according to social context | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |

This next set of questions will ask about your approaches to language instruction prior to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic (before March 2020).

How prominent are the following concepts in the design and delivery of your English classes?

| | Never | Rarely | Sometimes | Always |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| I incorporate authentic materials into instruction. | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| I structure my lessons in a way that maximizes interaction and communication between students. | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| I correct mistakes that students make when speaking if what | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| they are trying to communicate is unclear. | | | | |
| I allow students to share information about their native cultures in the classroom. | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| I allow students to make choices about classroom content. | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| I listen for common themes that students discuss and incorporate those into my lessons. | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| I relate class content to students' native cultures. | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| I allow students to remain silent until they feel ready to speak in class. | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| I plan for students to develop listening comprehension skills before speaking skills. | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| I allow students to share information about their native languages in the classroom. | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| I correct mistakes that students make when their message is easily understood. | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| I design lessons that are directly relevant to student's needs and interests. | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| I prioritize helping students make themselves understood more than I prioritize students' development of perfect language skills. | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |

This next set of questions will ask about the activities you used in your language classroom prior to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic (before March 2020).

How are the specific activities implemented in your language classroom decided upon? Select all that apply.

- State guidelines
- Organization guidelines
- My own discretion

How often is class content made accessible in the students' native languages (e.g. written translations, access to interpreters)?

- Never
- Rarely
- Sometimes
- Always

How often are the activities similar to the ones listed below used in your classroom?

| | Never | Rarely | Sometimes | Always |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Students memorize answers to given questions and are expected to give them quickly when prompted by the instructor. | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ |
| Students repeat sentences back to the instructor. | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ |
| Students are given a particular task or problem to consider, and must talk with other students in the class in order to resolve it. | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ |
| Students memorize lines of a dialogue and take turns reciting their roles. | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ |
| Students are given a particular prompt to discuss with a partner or in a group in order to exchange opinions and/or reach some type of agreement. | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ |
| Students learn about a given topic (e.g. systems of | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| government) in English as a means to practice their language skills. | | | | |
| Students respond to commands to demonstrate listening comprehension. | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| Students are all given a different piece of paper with a task written on it (e.g. find someone with the same favorite color) and are expected to ask questions to one another in order to find a partner or small group. | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| I allow students to make choices about classroom activities. | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |

How often does your class learn about the local community (e.g. city history, landmarks, culture, events, etc.)?

- Never
- Rarely
- Sometimes
- Always

How often does your language class participate in field trips into the community (e.g. to cultural events, historical sites, shopping centers, etc.)?

- Never
- Rarely
- Sometimes
- Always

Does your language class have discussions about preparing for and/or reflecting on English language use with native speakers?

- Never
- Rarely
- Sometimes
- Always

This next set of questions will ask about the materials used in your English language class prior

to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic (before March 2020).

How often does a typical class session depend on understanding of the written word?

- Never
- Rarely
- Sometimes
- Always

What are the primary sources of materials that you use in the classroom? Select all that apply.

- Published textbooks/workbooks
- Online resources
- Worksheets produced by myself
- Worksheets produced by our organization
- Printed images
- Videos

How do you decide what materials to use? Select all that apply.

- State guidelines
- Organization guidelines
- My own discretion

How often do students use their devices (e.g. smartphones, tablets, laptops) as a medium of learning in the classroom?

- Never
- Rarely
- Sometimes
- Always

This next set of questions will ask about assessments in your English language class prior to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic (before March 2020).

Do you formally assess student achievement throughout the course of your language class?

- Yes
- No

[If "yes" is selected]:
Select all of the areas in which student achievement is assessed throughout the course of your language class.

- Reading proficiency
- Writing proficiency
- Listening comprehension
- Speaking proficiency
- Pronunciation
- Vocabulary
- Grammar
- Appropriate use of verbal and nonverbal language according to social context

[If "yes" is selected]:
How do you assess student achievement throughout the course of your language class? Select all that apply.

- Reading comprehension quizzes/exams
- Writing-based quizzes/exams
- Conversation-based quizzes/exams
- Language portfolios
- Other: _____

Do you formally assess student achievement upon completion of your language class?

- Yes
- No

[If "yes" is selected]:

Select all of the areas in which student achievement is assessed upon completion of your language class.

- Reading proficiency
- Writing proficiency
- Listening comprehension
- Speaking proficiency
- Pronunciation
- Vocabulary
- Grammar
- Appropriate use of verbal and nonverbal language according to social context

[If "yes" is selected]:
How do you assess student achievement upon completion of your language class? Select all that apply.

- Reading comprehension quizzes/exams
- Writing-based quizzes/exams
- Conversation-based quizzes/exams
- Language portfolios
- Other: _____

Would you be interested in being contacted for participation in a follow-up interview via Zoom in exchange for a second $20 Amazon gift card? Please note that not everyone who selects "Yes" will be invited to participate.

- Yes
- No

Would you like to be contacted in the future to be invited to participate in similar research studies?

- Yes
- No

You have now reached the end of the survey.

We would like to thank you for your time by sending you a **$20 Amazon gift card**. Please enter the full name and email address of the recipient to which you would like the gift card to be sent. The gift card will arrive within one week of survey submission.

Full name: _____

Email address: _____

# Appendix B

## Introduction Script

Thank you again for completing the survey that I sent out and for taking the time to have this follow-up conversation with me today. I really appreciate your willingness to help out with this project. As I mentioned before, I'm currently researching what English language instruction looks like for refugees who are resettled in the United States, so your input is truly invaluable.

I do have a list of questions here that I would like to get through. As you read in the consent form, after I transcribe our conversation, any identifying information—including your name and the organization you work for—will be deleted and not shared with anyone other than my project advisor. This should not take the full 60 minutes, but once we are done I will go ahead and make sure that the second Amazon gift card is processed for you. Do you have any questions for me before we get started?

## Part 1: Activities

A. Could you describe what a typical day in your class looks like? Walk me through the typical structure of a lesson, from start to finish, especially focusing on the types of activities that you incorporate.
    a. [If the instructor has multiple levels of classes]: Start by describing your lower-level class. Then, we can circle back and talk about how your upper-level class compares to that.

B. In your survey, you indicated that specific activities in your lesson plans are decided upon through __(state guidelines, organization guidelines, and/or your own discretion)__. I'm interested in hearing more about this decision-making process. Specifically, do you have resources that you use for planning that provide guidance specifically for teaching languages to refugees?
    a. [If yes]: What do those resources look like?
    b. [If no]: What types of resources do you use?
    c. [All]: Tell me more about how you decide on particular activities.

C. [For some instructors]: In your survey, you indicated that there *are* refugee students in your classroom who are either preliterate or nonliterate.
    a. Do nonliterate and preliterate students receive modified instruction?
    b. If so, how?

## Part 2: Attrition

D. In your survey, you indicated that refugees typically remain in language classes with your organization for __(Less than 6 months, 6 months to 1 year, 2-4 years, 5+ years)__.
    a. For what types of reasons do students commonly leave classes?
    b. Are there any types of circumstances that you see that seem to help keep students engaged with the class over a greater period of time?
    c. Refugees are not eligible to take the Naturalization Test for citizenship until they have been a resident here for at least 5 years, and the test requires a fairly advanced knowledge of the English language. Does your organization offer any type of educational support until that point?

E. [For some instructors]: In your survey, you indicated that your organization *does* formally assess student achievement upon completion of your language class. You noted that ___*(Reading proficiency, Writing proficiency, Listening comprehension, Speaking proficiency, Pronunciation, Grammar, Vocabulary, AND/OR Appropriate use of verbal and nonverbal language according to social context)*__ are looked at as parts of this assessment, and that assessments typically take the form of __*(Reading comprehension quizzes/exams, Written quizzes/exams, Conversation-based quizzes/exams, Language portfolios, AND/OR Other methods)*__.
    a. Could you explain more about what this assessment process looks like?
    b. Do all students have this type of assessment? For example, if someone decides to stop attending classes for whatever reason before fully completing the course, do they also go through this assessment process?
    c. [For some]: What does this assessment process look like for those students who come into the class as either preliterate or nonliterate?